DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 188 299 EA 012 738

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TITLE Techniques to Use to Improve the Climate of Your Schools: Teacher Enrichment in Liberal Arts Colleges.
PUB DATE 12 Jan 80
NOTE 7p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (64th, Miami Beach, FL, January 11-15, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Faculty Development; Higher Education; Liberal Arts; *Professional Continuing Education; *Teacher Education Programs
IDENTIFIERS Dartmouth College NH; Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

ABSTRACT

New Hampshire's Dartmouth College offers a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program as well as an associated Humanities Institute to elementary and secondary school teachers during the summers. The programs provide teachers with renewed involvement in their academic specialities, utilize interdisciplinary courses to broaden the scope of information covered, and require the use of reasoning, self-expression, and critical thinking. The Humanities Institute specifically supports teachers working on curriculum improvement projects. Both projects leave participants excited about education and eager to return to teaching. (Author/PGD)

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Techniques to Use to Improve the Climate of Your Schools: Teacher Enrichment in Liberal Arts Colleges

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Presented at NASSP Conference
Miami, FLorida
January 12, 1980

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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Too many teachers today are burnt out, overworked, unenthused. That isn't new information to you as principals. However, you may have overlooked an under-utilized resource and valuable ally--the liberal arts college.

Most secondary teachers were motivated to teach at least in part because of their enthusiasm in exploring their own subject area. Once in the school, however, a teacher quickly adjusts to the realities of the social, psychological, and learning needs of the students, to the political issues of the school and community. Indeed most inservice courses available and many of the graduate programs teachers select in such areas as counseling, administration, special education, reflect their desire to better address these concerns. Teachers become buried under daily tasks: many burn out, leave the profession, or perhaps worse, stay and affect the morale of fellow faculty and students.

We at Dartmouth, using our strengths as a liberal arts college, have designed two programs for teachers which address these issues. The teachers return in a challenging and supportive program geared to adults; they broaden their knowledge or rediscover academic content as older learners, often with clearer goals than they had at age 18. Because they have more life experience, they

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approach the material with deeper perspective and with success. They work on important skills central to liberal arts learning and for which they are developmentally ready: reasoning, self-expression through speaking and writing, and critical thinking. Afterward they consistently stress their sense of personal renewal, their rediscovery of the joy of learning and an increased enthusiasm for their profession of teaching.

You may be interested in our programs for your teachers; also, you may want to use some of what we've learned in setting priorities for teacher enrichment and in-service programs in your schools.

I'd like to start by dispelling your possible assumption that our programs at Dartmouth are for the gifted teacher of the gifted student in the college-preparatory high school. Some of our teachers fit this mold, but most come from relatively undistinguished academic backgrounds. Teachers come from across the nation, but the programs were originally designed for the rural New Hampshire and Vermont educators who teach and are sensitive to a wide variety of students, from the gifted to the emotionally disturbed, culturally deprived potential dropout.

The Master of Arts in Liberal Studies Program has been in existence for ten years. The Program was developed for teachers who could earn an interdisciplinary degree in three or four summers while continuing full-time teaching during the year. Inherent in the MALS philosophy is the responsibility of the adult learner for creating an individual program of study to both deepen and broaden their knowledge and to meet personal and professional goals.

The MALS Program has several components: The central experience for all students is a colloquium (lecture series) on a contemporary theme. The quite relevant topic for summer 1980 is Religion and Politics in the World Today. Students meet in seminars to discuss the lectures. The MALS Program offers its special Liberal Studies courses where two or three professors approach a common topic from their various areas of expertise; two such courses include Black Arts and Letters taught by professors of literature and art history, and Optics, Art and Perception taught by professors of physics, philosophy, and art. In

addition each student selects an individual program of study based on his or her own goals, choosing from the full range of Dartmouth courses offered during the summer term. They then create a final project that reflects their individual plan. Projects vary from a traditional thesis to designing a solar home, from writing a novel to developing a math anxiety clinic. The program of 120 students offers significant financial aid to their students.

However, in an effort to provide even more support and also have more direct impact on the schools, we applied for and received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to provide a one summer Institute in which teachers are selected on the basis of curriculum projects they have proposed and which are supported by their administrators. These teachers pay no tuition and receive a small stipend. They also receive nine graduate credits which they can transfer into the MALS Program if they desire. They partake in a rich educational model: They take an interdisciplinary Liberal Studies course, one regular Dartmouth course related to their project, an Institute seminar in which the participants integrate intellectual themes in the humanities with work in their schools and share common concerns with other educators, a weekly conference and ongoing support from a tutor (Master Teacher) to explore resources and develop curriculum projects, informal meetings with visiting lecturers and Dartmouth faculty and two weekend workshops during the following year where program themes are further explored and the individual projects further examined.

Projects again vary greatly; one teacher wrote basic competencies for art that may well get adopted by her state; another Humanities Fellow designed a local history course for the non-academic student; a third designed a writing lab for his school; one is doing inservice on humanities for the learning disabled student; another is enriching her geometry class through its interface with art, religion, and history.

Students don't just take courses; integral to both programs is a supportive environment. Special meeting places and informal activities are planned, where the students see each other as resources and support.

How do we judge the impact of these programs? Through the comments of the teachers themselves, the evaluations of their administrators and of Dartmouth

professors and of the distinguished educators who visit the Institute as official evaluators, the evaluations of the on site visits to schools during the following year, and the number of colleagues who apply for the following year.

Most striking in the process, and I might add, moving for me to witness, is the teachers' new sense of self. As they haven't been in school for years, they are often tense and uncertain as the first exams and papers come due. They do succeed, often brilliantly. Students express better than I can their sense of renewal and increased self-worth, as well as their increased commitment to teaching.

"I began this program desperate for intellectual stimulation and I got it. I also basked in a very supportive, nice group of people which personally was wonderful."

"Living in a rural Vermont community can be a very isolated experience. This past summer was a chance to share life with people of all ages . . . . I've gained a new sensitivity as to how my students, from handicapped to gifted, must feel in the classroom."

"The summer has made me realize that the academic experience is, for me, a source of pride and joy."

"The program has increased my desire to achieve scholastic excellence on my own part and on a continuing basis. Also, I learned that I can work for hours at a time--days and weeks, yet on a project of my own design."

What does this mean to schools?

One teacher put it this way: "My participation has given me a boost in morale that I needed. It has also given me a reason to assume some leadership in my school." Another stresses the changes in her teaching: "The Institute is largely responsible for the efficiency and priorities in my classroom this year. There is much less busy work there for me and the students. More time is spent on thinking, discussing, writing and reading for a meaningful purpose. It's refreshing."

The teachers in the Institute return at the end of the summer with a curriculum in hand; the students benefit as the teacher's enthusiasm is contagious; an administrator reported that one English teacher, on successfully changing her approach to an English Literature course, offered inservice training to her department. Another, who came to develop a new mini-course also brought back the kernel for a writing lab based on the project another student had developed.

What does Dartmouth have to offer that is so special? For a start, its excellent library, its audio-visual resources and computer which is readily accessible to all students year round. Colleges are up-to-date on learning in content areas which are unfamiliar, especially to older teachers--new areas such as Black Studies, Native American Studies, Women's Studies. New discoveries in the sciences are available to science teachers. The students in our programs work closely with the professors, who are accessible and are in fact available as consultants and guest speakers in local schools.

Where are we going from here? The MALS Program is growing every year, drawing on a more varied population of adults. Summer 1980 will be the third of a 3-5 year grant from NEH to sponsor the Institute. We are looking for and finding some success in asking local corporations to sponsor teachers from their communities as a commitment to improve education in the local schools. We want this Institute to continue.

Because we also recognize the vital role of administrators in providing support for teachers in our programs, we involve them in the process--they recommend teachers before the summer, we update them at the end of the summer on the teacher's progress, and we ask them for an evaluation the following spring. We are also planning to involve the many interested administrators in this opportunity to engage in multidisciplinary content learning and to collaborate in the development of their teachers' projects.

I want to add that Dartmouth is not alone. There are 30 colleges across the country who are part of the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs who work together to develop our philosophy and mutually strengthen our programs. Three of these schools also have NEH supported Institutes similar in

goals to ours. Other GLS schools are working to create a Doctorate in Liberal Studies.

Of course there are many colleges and universities offering strong liberal arts programs. And as administrators you are in a position to foster teacher renewal--by encouraging teachers to attend stimulating academic programs at colleges and by offering exciting inservice programs in content areas.

As one participant sums up her Dartmouth summer: "It's potentially mentally invigorating, almost a personal renaissance which reaffirms that teachers are students, and that teachers should be scholars. It's inspired me to be a more demanding student and teacher."